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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines proposals focusing on what individuals may contribute in an attempt to generate positive action in meeting the special and unique educational needs of children who have limited English-speaking ability and who come from minority or ethnic backgrounds. Problems facing teachers and students from bilingual and bicultural communities are exposed in comments from local and national political leaders. (RL)

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A Cause in Search of Understanding and Leadership: Bilingual and Bicultural Education*

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In any other city but New York, this very special event would be little more than a curtain call to bring to a graceful close the one year that I have spent as President of this old and honored Association. But this is not just a curtain call and not just another city for me because New York is where I have my roots, where, as a son of immigrant Italians, I lived and studied for many years. It is also the city where I learned my first words in Spanish at Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn, more years ago than I care to remember. No. This is not just another event, it is a "happening" which could not possibly have been programmed so perfectly even by the most sophisticated computor. Consequently, this moment holds for me a special kind of excitement, a special pleasure which I hope you will share with me during the final episode of my tenure as your President.

The elation which I feel, however, will not cause me to soften the seriousness of the message I have chosen to bring to you this afternoon: What this Association can do and what it must do to generate positive action in meeting the special and unique educational needs of children who

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have limited English-speaking ability and who come from environments other than English. Why should this be a major concern of this Association? Precisely because almost all of these children are Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, or Cubans. The estimated Spanish-speaking population in the United States numbers more than 16,000,000. About 2,000,000 of their children are studying in our elementary schools. These are not foreigners in our midst, and Spanish is no longer a "foreign" language in this country. If this talk were to be broadcast in Spanish into the lobby of this hotel and into the streets of New York, about one out of every four persons would understand me. The same would be true in almost all large urban centers, in slightly varying numbers, and certainly just about everywhere in the Southwest and in Southern California. No. Spanish is not a "foreign" language. It is a living reality of the American scene and we are an important part of that reality as teachers and students of Spanish. The responsibility for leadership in the area of bilingual teaching is, consequently, thrust upon us whether we like it or not.

Herman Badillo, Congressman of New York City, in an address given in Chicago on November 26, 1971 at the Fifth Annual Meeting of ACTFL said the following: "Second-class status must no longer be imposed on those persons who do not speak English and we must not prevent such persons from sharing in the rights and privileges of citizenship. We exist in a multilingual and multicultural environment and all segments of the community must be afforded full respect and equal participation."[1] There are a few positive actions of consequence which have occurred since Mr. Badillo's address, such as the appointment by former President Seymour Menton of a special committee to study the issue; a committee which I converted into a "Task Force" with a more precise mission and mandate. On April 14 and 15 of this

year the Texas Education Agency sponsored a National Conference on Bilingual Education in Austin, Texas. These actions will cause some ripples on the surface of the stream but they will not get to the heart of the problem unless the members of this Association commit themselves to broaden widely at the grass roots the scope of their activities and make their voices heard outside the confines of the professional structure. As I said in my President's Corner which appeared in the December, 1971, issue of Hispania, "The AATSP should actively and publicly support legislation related to the field of bilingual education, using all of the popular media possible. Publicity in Hispania is not enough. We don't have to convince each other, but we must convince the general public and legislators that the time is 'now,' not ten years from now, for funding programs, institutes, and continuing research. There is much to be done, not only to implement the Bilingual Education Act (H.R. 7819) passed by Congress in 1967, but also to seek new legislation to support new programs in Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies. Let us rally around this vital issue which in fact may become our greatest asset, because it makes the study of Spanish not only relevant but also profitable, and academically defensible."[2] Yes. We must stop talking mainly to each other at meetings such as these and in professional journals such as Hispania and Foreign Language Annals. We must get our message across where it counts, in the Congress of the United States, in the State Legislatures, at School Board Meetings, at Town Hall Meetings, in Parent-Teacher Associations, etc. This can be our great cause in the seventies, a cause which can offer us not only great joy and satisfaction, but also a kind of unity of purpose which every Association needs from time to time to revitalize itself. This great cause is made to order for us, for what greater mission could we have in this decade than

working for fair treatment for our 16,000,000 Spanish-speaking Americans in the schools and in the communities in which they live.

Our efforts in behalf of such interaction between not only two languages but also two cultures, would also produce important residual benefits which would place the study of Spanish in the mainstream of American life and education. No foreign language at all is required now in most Schools of Education which train almost all of our elementary school teachers. Demands for bilingual teaching would make it difficult for such schools in large urban centers to omit a knowledge of Spanish in their curriculum either as a strong recommendation or as a requirement. The growth of bilingual programs will also create a genuine, relevant justification for the study of Spanish in other disciplines: Social Work, Law, Medicine, Psychology and Agriculture, to mention a few. For example, it seems ridiculous in these times for most medical schools to require only French or German or Latin for admission when many doctors will practice in large urban hospitals where numerous patients are Spanish-speaking. The main problem is communication between doctor and patient, not research in the foreign language. Have any of you ever experienced the frustration of trying to communicate the symptoms of your ailment to someone who doesn't understand your language? The fear that such a situation creates is something worse than the sickness itself, and it certainly does not help the patient psychologically to cope with the situation. Let us all put pressure on medical schools to change their archaic requirement in the name of common sense and common decency. There is also a need for more flexibility in most Spanish programs in high schools and colleges to set up courses featuring readings, vocabulary and situations which will relate to the experiences of lawyers, and social workers, for example, who may work

in bilingual communities. This is all a part of the same mission; the need to communicate at all levels and in different ways with the millions of Spanish-speaking Americans.

I wish I could say that we have come a long way to achieve even modest success since 1967 when the "Bilingual Education Act" was passed by the Congress of the United States. But the unhappy reality is that we have barely scratched the surface, partly for lack of money, and partly because of wide ignorance in many communities of what bilingual and bicultural programs really mean. The lofty goals envisioned by the sponsors of the long overdue legislation could not, and still can not be fully realized because of the lack of sufficient funds to implement the programs. The bill authorized a total sum of $250,000,000 for fiscal years 1969, 1970, 1971 and 1972 but the amount actually appropriated for bilingual programs during these years has been just about $100,000,000, or less than half the amount authorized, which has been totally inadequate to provide bilingual education not only for Spanish-speaking groups but also for the many other language groups which were supposed to benefit from bilingual education programs.[3]

When the bill was debated in 1967, Congressman William F. Ryan, 20th District of New York, urged approval with the following words: "It is vital that Americans with other cultural heritages not be divorced from their heritage by the need to assimilate rapidly, but rather have full opportunities to learn and appreciate the culture associated with their mother tongue. This bill will be of enormous value to America's bilingual citizens, especially those of Spanish-speaking backgrounds, whose opportunity for advancement is currently limited by the language barrier."[4]

Thank you Mr. Ryan for persuading your colleagues in the House to

vote in favor of the Act but I doubt that many of them understood what bilingual and bicultural programs are all about, and certainly not the urgency for such programs. I wonder how many Congressmen and Senators ever read the Declaration of Policy of the Act which stated "In recognition of the special educational needs of the large numbers of children of limited English-speaking ability in the United States, Congress hereby declares it to be the policy of the United States to provide financial assistance to local educational agencies to develop and carry out new and imaginative elementary and secondary school programs to meet these special needs...."[5] One thing seems certain: there weren't many who realized the full impact of the problem because in a Senate hearing on this problem chaired by Senator Mondale of Minnesota which took place in January, 1971, Senator Mondale confessed to a group of Puerto Ricans that he could only dimly understand their bilingual dilemma. The response of a former Puerto Rican student, Juan Negrón, was dramatically illuminating. His brief performance was worth a thousand words of rhetoric on the floor of either chamber of the legislature or in the Congressional Record: "Well Senator, it's like this" said Negrón, speaking in English, and then slipping into rapid Spanish. A sheepish smile crossed Senator Mondale's face and he reportedly replied, "I think I am beginning to understand."[6] It takes a little acting, a mini-drama, to bring about understanding. The same drama could be played out by many of us in much the same way to get the message across at School Board meetings, job orientation sessions, and City Council meetings, just to mention a few places. Imagine the shock of an employee if he reported to a new job and a supervisor gave instructions in a foreign language. Imagine the shock of a School Board if you started your report in English and then shifted suddenly to a foreign language. It would not

take long for the message to sink deeply. Juan Negrón's performance was absolutely stupendous. It should be repeated everywhere, in every city, town and village where bilingual education is a necessity, and even where it isn't, just to get people used to the idea and thinking about it because Senator Mondale's reaction to a language which he did not understand is played out daily in thousands of school classrooms throughout the United States as Spanish-speaking and other foreign language speaking children struggle to get an education in a system pegged almost exclusively to English. Consequently, we have in Mondale's own words, "a national scandal."

For Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban and Portuguese parents, the effect is much more personal. They know only too well the consequences of neglect which breed inferiority, frustration, and the role of a social outcast. They know that they face a heavy drop-out rate. Often many of the children are demoted two or three grades or they are classified as "retarded." Armando Martínez, a Puerto Rican who holds a Master's Degree from Harvard, once said, "I was kept in classes with mentally retarded children until I was 13 years old."[7] They put the children in special classes and call them dumb. That way they can say the school system didn't fail--that the children failed. And what is the terrible, inevitable consequence of such rationalization? Many of these children face a future of unskilled jobs and a street life haunted by drug addiction and unemployment. The television program "Sesame Street" got the message rather quickly when they announced in 1971 that starting November 15 the Fall season's broadcasts were to include Spanish-English bilingual segments. Some newspapers in many cities feature daily pages in Spanish of the major news events of the day. These media of communication and entertainment understand what

bilingualism is all about. Why can't we get the message across to educators and politicians who thrive on communication for survival? The reason is simply that "Sesame Street" and some newspapers know their audience much better than many school superintendents and school boards.

Bicultural programs are an indispensible concomitant of effective bilingual programs but there seems to be even less understanding about the meaning of such programs, except, of course, among those who are directly involved in these experiments. One problem is the common notion that all Spanish-speaking children are cut out of the same cloth when in fact we know as teachers of Spanish that they speak with varied accents and that their cultural patterns differ widely. We cannot equate Puerto Ricans with Chicanos, or Cubans with Argentines any more than we can equate a New Englander with a Southerner, or a New Yorker with a Texan. Consequently, we have, by design or ignorance, an attempt to strip Spanish-speaking children of their cultural heritage either by making them conform to each other or by making them conform to the communities' concept of what constitutes an American. Sylvia Herrera Fox, Chicago director of the Aspira Foundation, has called this "a monolithic assault on the psyche of our students." There is a need to maintain a student's heritage and culture as he is introduced to English and to the patterns of American culture. "Our society has taken its toll of kids by depriving them of their self image," said Michael Quinn of the Chicago system. "A child has to stand tall before he can learn reading, writing and arithmetic."[8]

Respect cannot come from forced sameness but rather from progress which will educate children and teachers of all races and nationalities about the heritage, the history, the language, the traditions of Spanish-speaking people. From the beginning, America has had a curious history.

It has never been a melting into an American Pot, or an assimilation to an American archetype, or an acculturation to an American civilization, or a preservation within America of a separate culture. The dilemma about the meaning of bicultural arises from the false assumptions about assimilation, without taking into consideration who makes the process happen or how it happens, whether it's a process of assimilating or being assimilated, whether Chicanos or Puerto Ricans, Portuguese, Italians, or Irish are becoming similar, actively, reflexively, because they will it, or are they being made similar because they cannot help it.[9] You will notice that I have avoided in this context the term American. I confess that this was not an oversight but absolutely intentional because I maintain that there are no typical Americans to be similar to, and that Americans who consider themselves the regular kind are themselves constantly changing to the point that we have to admit that others of diverse heritage, whatever their apparent irregularities, are thoroughly American too. I was de-Italianized early in my life, and also many others of my generation with the same background, because we were made to feel, consciously or unconsciously, that an aura of ignorance permeated both the use of the Italian language and customs. It is frightening to think that this attitude still has wide currency but today it is the Spaniards, or the "Spics," or "Mex," as they are sometimes called. I see some hope, however, that the conscience of the people of this country might be moved to recognition of this dilemma when I read books like Barrio Boy by Ernesto Galarza, which he wrote to present the experience of boys like himself. The book was written also to refute as Galarza says "psychologists, psychiatrists, social anthropologists, and other manner of 'shrinks' [who] have spread the rumor that these Mexican immigrants and their offspring have lost their 'self-image.' By this, of

course, they mean that a Mexican doesn't know what he is; and if by chance he is something, it isn't any good. I, for one Mexican, never had any doubts on this score. I can't remember a time I didn't know who I was, and I have heard much testimony from my friends and other more detached persons to the effect that I thought too highly of what I thought I was. It seemed to me unlikely that out of six or seven million Mexicans in the United States I was the only one who felt this way."[10]

Here I find my answer to those who would assimilate the "foreigners" among us. A new chapter in American education will be written when we abandon systematically the notion that Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Chicanos, should forget who they were and when we recognize and respect linguistic and cultural differences for what they are, just differences--not aberrations--which will in the short and long run enrich the lives of a multitude of so-called Americans in so many communities. It is nice to package everything neatly with fancy trimmings but education and the lives of young people cannot be packaged with an assembly line psychology.

Now it is time to remind you of the title of this talk: "A Cause in Search of Understanding and Leadership: Bilingual and Bicultural Education." Many people have given unstintingly of their time to this cause, individually and collectively, in many communities North, South, East and West. But now is the time to consolidate our forces and our positions. We cannot hope that someone somewhere will suddenly see the light and wave a magic wand to change the hearts and minds of people, or at least loosen the purse strings. No. We can make progress only if the efforts of so many dedicated people--many of whom belong to this Association--are coordinated effectively. What can the AATSP do? What can you do? A great deal, I think. This Association can and must offer full

support, financial, professional and moral in the area of bilingual and bicultural education. This aid from the top will be effective only with unprecedented cooperation at the grass roots level, in the local chapters everywhere. We need massive efforts at the local level especially in states like New York, Florida, Illinois, Texas, California, in large and small cities everywhere, even isolated villages where the education of Spanish-speaking children is--to use Senator Mondale's words again--"A national scandal."

The first step is to educate ourselves about the problem and then we must carry the message to where it counts: to State Legislators, to Superintendents of Education, to local School Boards, and to the general public at Council meetings. If necessary, put on a performance like Juan Negrón did when speaking to Senator Mondale, to dramatize the meaning of and the need for bilingual education. This is not an act, it is a reality for so many Spanish-speaking children every day. That's the message you want to get across directly, effectively, with the best weapon at your command to communicate the message, the Spanish language itself. Let's face it. There are millions who are not at all convinced that bilingual education merits continued funding and continuing research, or preparation of more teachers.

Many of you may want to know where to obtain information to carry the message. There is much literature on the subject scattered in pages of professional and popular journals. There have been at least a dozen fairly authoritative books on the Chicano situation published in recent years. I have already mentioned Barrio Boy; another book which has had fairly wide circulation is North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States, by Carey McWilliams.[11] But while these books are excellent

reading and I recommend them, they don't organize the information in a way which can easily be extracted and condensed for people involved in the kind of affirmative action, grass roots movement I am calling for. There is a great need for quick communication of essential information between all groups, at all levels. but communication cannot be achieved without coordination of efforts. For this purpose, I propose that the AATSP use its prestige and strength to persuade the "U. S. Office of Education" to set up a permanent Bilingual and Bicultural Center with a staff of specialists to function as the nerve center of the program much in the way a political committee functions, to initiate action and to get out information to its constituents throughout the country. The time is riper now than it has ever been to obtain funding from the "Department of Health, Education and Welfare" to pay the salaries of specialists and staff who I hope will be found among the members of this Association. The "Task Force" chaired by Alonso Perales does not possess such a mission or mandate but the report this group will publish can provide the kind of information many of us need to educate ourselves and educate others until such a permanent committee is organized. Another excellent source of information of a different kind already available is the report which was commissioned by the Executive Council of AATSP in 1970. This report was prepared by a nine-member committee, chaired by Bruce Gaarder, with Donald D. Walsh as the project manager. The English version of this document entitled Teaching Spanish in School and College to Native Speakers of Spanish was published in the October, 1972, issue of Hispania.[12] It can also be purchased for 25 cents from the "Government Printing Office" in Washington, D. C. Later the University of California at Santa Barbara will publish a bilingual edition of the report, and I have also heard that the same

document will be reprinted in a book of essays on bilingual schooling to be published in New York. Gaarder's report offers some valuable information on how to achieve a higher degree of literacy in our teaching. If you desire some basic information, well-organized, like program descriptions, curriculum materials, testing, research, and models for bilingual education, I suggest you consult a recent book by Vera John and Vivian Horner, entitled Early Childhood Bilingual Education published by the M.L.A.-ACTFL Materials Center. These publications and the forthcoming Perales' "Task Force" report may very well be the springboard for immediate action. The first step is to get every AATSP Chapter, every State Foreign Language Supervisor, every City Foreign Language Supervisor, every Foreign Language Department Chairman, every Chicano and every Puerto Rican Studies Supervisor, to organize a series of discussions based on the books and reports mentioned to see what can be done at the State and community level to improve instruction for native speakers of Spanish or Portuguese where necessary. Such discussions at the local level will not only spread the gospel but they may also generate valuable ideas, uncover valuable information, or clarify procedures for stimulating action and financial support which may be of great help to all programs, regardless of geographical locations.

The situation today is quite different from what it was when I was a child in this city's schools. The lack of concern at that time among the teachers in these schools for cultural differences which the children of immigrant parents carried within them, consciously or subconsciously, caused a gradual erosion from one generation to another in language, in customs, and worse yet, in admiration for the very characteristics which set them apart from the stereotype concept of an American. There are so

many ethnic groups today in all of the States of this large and varied country which have lost their identity in all except the name itself. However different the atmosphere and mood of our country may be today, I still fear a repetition of the same errors which created the false ideal of sameness among us. This must not happen and it will not happen if schools and community programs create an environment in which there is respect, not scorn, for young people who speak a language which is different, whose values are different, whose economic status is different, but who also have an American dream, an American dream which does not demand loss of identity, an American dream which reinforces rather than erodes a sense of pride in their heritage.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the functions of a Presidential address is to bring an annual meeting to a graceful close. I hope that this talk has served that formal function well but I hope even more that the substance of my talk will sound the bell, on a national scale, for the opening round against ignorance, against injustices which have plagued the Spanish-speaking population of this country for many decades. I repeat, and this cannot be repeated often enough: These are not foreigners among us and the Spanish language is no longer a "foreign" language in this country, but rather a language in which millions of the people of this land communicate, and will continue to do so in ever increasing proportions for a long, long time.

The AATSP has piloted many worthwhile causes since its inception more than a half-century ago. I can not recall any cause, however, which will touch so many people, and will arouse the social conscience of the United States more than the cause which I have addressed myself to on this occasion. The bilingual and bicultural dilemma may, in fact, be the last

great cause we will be called upon to sponsor in this century. But let us not wait for official action from the top to get this grass roots action started. Official proclamations often take a long time to compose and an even longer time to implement. Let us not wait for the other person to start something. I am asking you, therefore, all of you, to carry this message home with you. Start organizing colloquiums now; get as many people involved as possible inside and outside the profession. We need your help and your counsel now. Let us hear from you. You can write to me, or even better, to our new President, Dr. Theodore Andersson, who is no newcomer to this cause. He has been waging the fight for bilingual and bicultural education for a long time, long before I ever knew that such a problem existed. I know that you can count on him to continue constructively and effectively the plea for massive action which I have advanced for "A Cause in Search of Understanding and Leadership: Bilingual and Bicultural Education."

Notes

1. "The Politics and Reality of Bilingual Education," Foreign Language Annals, Vol. 5 (March, 1972), 301.

2. Vol. 55 (December, 1972), 920.

3. Information supplied by Herman Badillo in his speech "The Politics . . .," 298.

4. Congressional Record. Appendix (December 27, 1967).

5. Congressional Record, Sec. 702 (December 27, 1967).

6. UPI release written by David E. Anderson reported in The News-Gazette (Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, Sunday, January 3, 1971), 32.

7. Ibid., 32.

8. AP release reported in The News-Gazette (Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, August 7, 1972), 7.

9. See John Womack, Jr., "The Chicanos," The New York Review, Vol. IX (August 31, 1972), 12-18, for interesting information on this subject.

10. Ernesto Galarza, Barrio Boy (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971), p. 2.

11. Greenwood Press (New York, 1968).

12. Vol. 55, 620-31.